

BERING SEA

Survey aims at solving mystery of cod caught out of place. A4.

SPORTS BLOG

Alaskan athletes making their marks around the world. B1.

AIDAN KEY

Former Juneauite, twin sister talk transgender journey. Below.

NEW OWNERS, NEW NAME



MICHAEL PENN | JUNEAU EMPIRE
Garrett Schoenberger, left, and Paul Simpson, of Alaska Legacy Partners, have bought 27 acres of land that make up the Mendenhall Business Park they announced on Monday.

Valuable property could see long-term changes

Changes coming soon to coffee shop, open lot

By ALEX MCCARTHY
JUNEAU EMPIRE

It all starts with a name. Garrett Schoenberger and Paul Simpson, the two partners in Juneau real estate group Alaska Legacy Partners, sat at Heritage Coffee Company's Glacier Café on Monday morning and talked about their recent purchase of the land under and around Mendenhall Mall Road. (They did not buy the mall, but bought the land it's on). The area has always been associated with the mall, but includes various unrelated businesses that have all developed their own identities. "This park's never really been defined, either," Schoenberger said. "It's 'the Mendenhall Mall area.' ...



MICHAEL PENN | JUNEAU EMPIRE
The Mendenhall Business Park is pictured on Monday.

So we're working to help define this, and we're going to call this area Mendenhall Business Park." ALP closed on the sale of the 27-acre Mendenhall Business Park on May 3, they said in an interview Monday. They bought it from the family of Charlie Robinson, who died five years ago. The family has been looking to sell the property since then, Schoenberger and Simpson said.

SEE MALL | Page A6

Senate proposes PFD total

Governor pledges to veto it

By ALEX MCCARTHY
JUNEAU EMPIRE

After all the talk of a super-sized dividend or a smaller-than-average dividend, Alaskans might be getting the same Permanent Fund Dividend this year that they got last year. The Alaska Senate is considering a bill that would give out a \$1,600 dividend this year, which would be the same amount as last year. The Senate Finance Committee, chaired by Sens. Bert Stedman and Natasha von Imhof, proposed the bill Monday, and the Senate is set to debate the bill at 9 a.m. Tuesday. The bill introduced Monday, Senate Bill 1002, could be amended on the Senate floor Tuesday, so



SEN. BERT STEDMAN

"This bill kills the Permanent Fund Dividend as we know it." the \$1,600 figure could change before it gets sent to the House. Gov. Mike Dunleavy would also have to sign off on the bill, and he has been adamant that he wants to give Alaskans a full, \$3,000 dividend. Dunleavy did not mince words in a statement Monday, assuring that if the bill gets to his desk, he will veto it. "This bill kills the Permanent Fund Dividend as we know it," Dunleavy said in his statement. "The PFD is your share of Alaska's mineral wealth, and there should be no change to the dividend without a vote of the people."

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Southeast Alaska man dies in early morning rollover

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

ANGOON — A 44-year-old Southeast Alaska man died in a weekend pickup crash. Alaska State Troopers said the crash killed Casey Meyers of Angoon early Sunday morning. Troopers just after 5:30 a.m. took reports of an overturned truck. Investigators determined that Meyers was

driving alone on Killisnoo Road and entered the ditch. The pickup hit an embankment and rolled several times. Meyers was ejected. Emergency responders attempted CPR but he died at the scene. Angoon is a village of 438 about 55 miles southwest of Juneau. It's the only permanent settlement on Admiralty Island.

LGBTQ NEWS

'Bathroom bills' documentary features former Juneauite



COURTESY PHOTO | BRENDA BOWERS
Brenda Bowers stands with her brother Aidan Key, who is one of the central figures in the documentary "The Most Dangerous Year."

He and his twin sister tell the personal story that helped make the big-picture film

By BEN HOHENSTATT
JUNEAU EMPIRE

Aidan Key knew history was being made, but he didn't see anyone recording it. So as bills that would restrict which bathrooms transgender people were allowed to use were discussed in Washington state back in 2016, Key — an author, speaker and community organizer who grew up in Juneau and navigated his own transition — reached out to filmmaker Vlada Knowlton to capture some footage of a

Snohomish School District meeting. "I just felt that history is happening all around me," Key said in a phone interview. "It's just moment by moment every day, this huge pivotal moment is happening in time and nobody's capturing it." Knowlton filming the meeting was the first step toward "The Most Dangerous Year," a documentary about transgender children and "bathroom bills" that Key is bringing Juneau Thursday evening. Despite attempts in more

than 20 states, bathroom bills have largely failed to become law. That includes Proposition 1 in Anchorage, which was voted down in April 2018. In Juneau and Anchorage, there are ordinances that prohibits LGBTQ discrimination. A similar state bill has made slow progress, but has now twice made it out of committee. Key, who is director for Gender Diversity, a nonprofit that increased awareness and understanding of gender diversity in children, said he's proud to share the documentary and his story with Juneau. "I love my work," Key said.

SEE KEY | Page A6

PFD:

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“That’s what I promised on the campaign and that’s the promise I intend to keep. I cannot and will not support this legislation.”

During his campaign and prior to the session beginning, Dunleavy asserted his desire to not only pay a full, \$3,000 PFD, but to also include back payments to make

up for the fact that the Alaska Legislature cut the PFD amount the past three years to balance the state’s budget. Legislators have all but ignored the back pay option.

Speaker of the House Bryce Edgmon told The Associated Press on Monday that he believes there would be support in the House for the \$1,600 total. He went on to tell the AP that if Dunleavy vetoed the bill, it would almost certainly cause another special session.

During this legislative session, lawmakers have

been gridlocked on the amount of the dividend and the future of the fund itself. The Legislature has had to go into a special session (which is now halfway through its 30 days) to iron out the PFD, along with the budget and other issues. Some lawmakers have advocated for a full PFD, while some have suggested lower-than-usual dividends. The original budget from the House, for example, allowed for about a \$1,200 dividend.

SB 1002 unanimously passed the Senate Rules

Committee on Monday. During that committee meeting, Stedman spoke about the ins and outs of the bill. The bill would take \$770 million from the state’s general fund and \$172 million from the budget reserve fund (which the Legislature is allowed to access as long as a majority of members vote to do so).

It would also take between \$128 million and \$148 million from the Alaska Higher Education Investment Fund. This fund assists Alaskans who pursue secondary education

in state. Stedman said the fund currently has more than \$300 million in it, and said he doesn’t think drawing this money puts the fund in jeopardy in the short term.

Stedman and the members of the Senate Rules Committee — a group that includes Senate President Cathy Giessel, Majority Leader Mia Costello and Minority Leader Tom Begich — agreed that it’s vital that the Legislature figures out a way to make the PFD sustainable into the future. “We’re impacting our descendents, and not

(just) for next year or 10 years from now, but 25 years from now, 50 years from now, 100 years from now, it goes on in perpetuity,” Stedman, a Sitka Republican, said. “So it’s a significant decision that faces the Legislature, how to finance our current obligations and not devour our seed capital that really should be left for future generations of Alaskans.”

• Contact reporter Alex McCarthy at amccarthy@juneauempire.com. Follow him on Twitter at @akmccarthy.

MALL:

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They were attracted to the area because it’s in a prime location, at the meeting of three major roadways, and there’s still potential to do more. There are a couple lots that could be developed, including a man-made pond near the gas station that they hope to fill in and make into developable land.

Though Schoenberger and Simpson are eyeing a long-term vision for the area, there are a couple substantial changes that are already in motion and could be made in the next

couple years.

The City and Borough of Juneau has wanted to put a new transit facility in an open lot next door to the Glacier Café — where there is currently a bus stop — for more than a decade, CBJ Project Manager Lori Sowa said Monday. In August 2018, the city awarded DOWL Engineering a bid to design the transit center, according to CBJ documents.

Sowa said it’s a somewhat complex project, because the city wants to buy the land. They have to figure out where the property lines would be for that property, Sowa said, before they buy it. She said she and others at the city have been working with ALP and that it’s going well, but it’s just a

complex process.

The location is ideal for a transit hub, Sowa said, because of its central location. It will be much larger than the Valley’s current transit hub, which is located near the Nugget Mall. It will include a small facility for bus drivers to take breaks and will have a spot where people can park their cars before taking a bus somewhere.

Calling it a transit center, she said, is a little misleading because people automatically picture the downtown transit center, which is a building that includes a police substation and retail space.

“I don’t know that I would compare it to the downtown transit center,” Sowa said. “That one’s an enclosed build-

ing. This won’t be an enclosed building. People will still be protected by the weather, but we’re not proposing to build a building.”

Next door to that property, the Heritage location is also set to go through major changes. It’s currently in the design phase for a new building, Heritage President and CEO Amy Knight said via email.

The new building will have two stories, Knight said, and might have an outdoor patio area too. Knight said she hopes to start construction in 2020.

“The Glacier Café has consistently been one of our busier cafes, and I am excited for the upcoming changes to the area,” Knight said via email. “The Alaska Legacy Part-

ners seem to have a lot of fresh ideas that I believe will help revitalize the neighborhood.”

Schoenberger and Simpson said it’s an encouraging sign that Heritage and the city are already moving on projects.

“It’s contagious,” Schoenberger said. “When somebody builds a new building or a building gets a facelift, the other property owners see that. The goal is to just take a proactive approach to thinking strategically long-term about, how do we make this park better?”

ALP has purchased the Jetty property in Auke Bay (which will include a brewery and a condominium building) and Legacy

Senior Living (which will turn a former city property on Hurlock Avenue into a senior living center), and has closed on all three of these properties in under two years.

The property is assessed at \$18 million, and is one of the most valuable properties on the CBJ’s tax roll, according to an ALP press release Monday.

Schoenberger and Simpson, who were both born and raised in Juneau, said that buying this property was a no-brainer.

“Like once in a lifetime do you see a major land lease deal come up for sale,” Simpson said, “so we’re really excited we got to purchase this, and do it in our hometown.”

KEY:

Continued from Page A1

“I love bringing it home. I want to share it with the people I grew up with because they’re who I grew up with. Even with them, there’s questions and curiosity and so forth, and they’re proving to me a theory that I have in life, which is that people are people. They have questions about things they don’t know much about.”

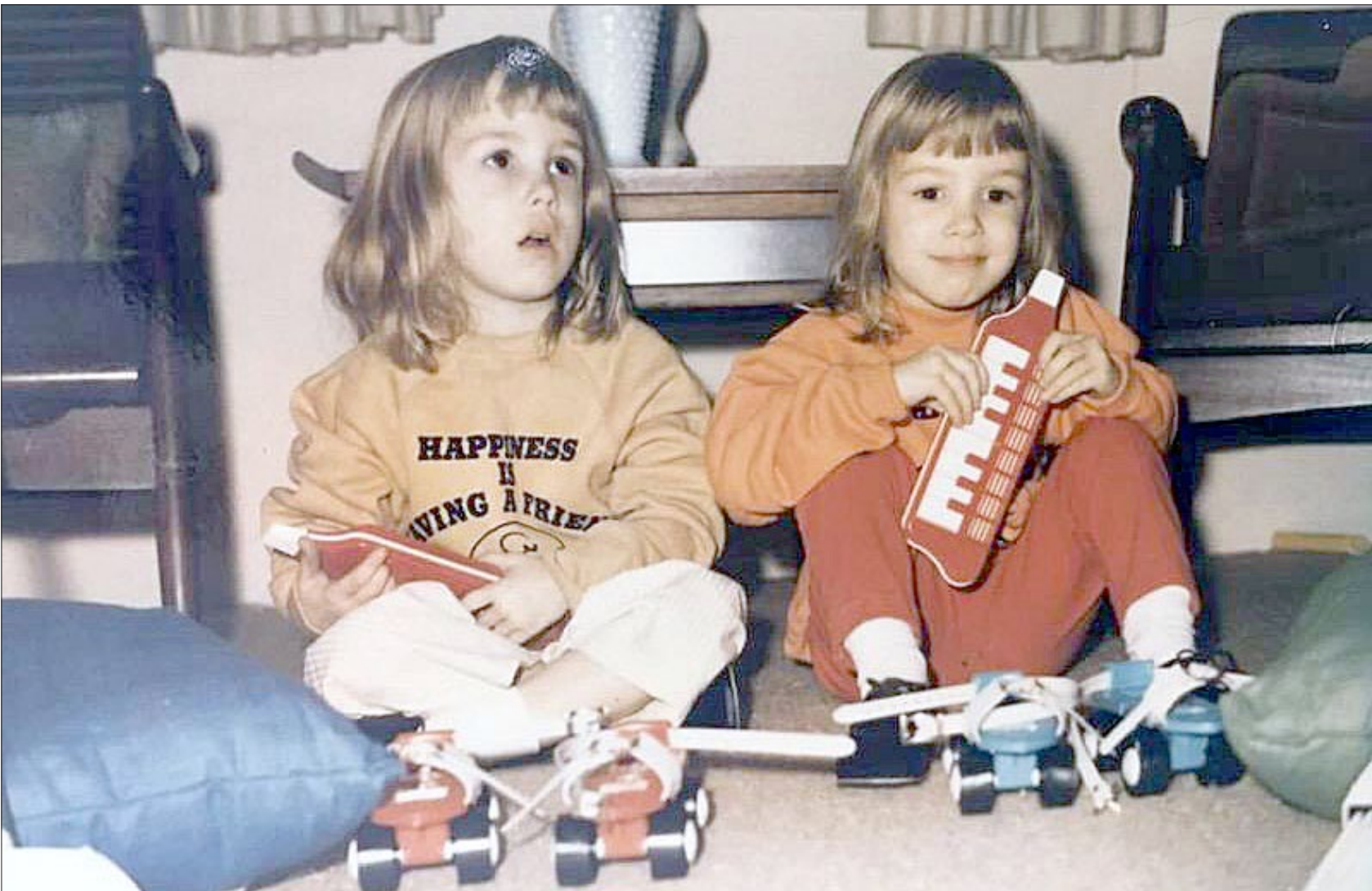
While the film is not about Key’s journey, he said his transition from Bonnie Bowers to Aidan Key is integral to its existence.

“If I didn’t have this personal journey, I wouldn’t be chatting with you today,” Key said.

He said he hopes “The Most Dangerous Year” and a planned question-and-answer session after help illustrate the humanity at the heart of the documentary.

“My hope is that in all the various people featured in the film that they recognize themselves, they recognize their neighbor,” Key said. “What I hope that they really get is how challenging and complex this issue is to have it touch someone’s life.”

That challenge extends to family, friends, loved



COURTESY PHOTO | BRENDA BOWERS

Brenda Bowers and Bonnie Bowers, now Aidan Key, grew up as identical twins. In the late '90s, Key realized he intended to transition to male. He now lives in Seattle and is an author, speaker and community organizer.

ones and supporters of transgender people, Key said.

Brenda Bowers, Key’s twin sister who still lives in Juneau, told the Empire about what it was like in

1998 when she found out her twin sister would become her brother.

“She called me from Seattle and said, ‘I want to come see you, I have something I need to talk to you about,’” Bowers said. “Well, that’s very, very unusual. We talk about everything all the time. To say, ‘I need to be there to talk to you in person scared the crap out of me. I had to wait for the flight to happen. I kind of tried to run through the possibilities. I landed on cancer or some serious health issue, and I was utterly terrified.’”

However, as soon as Key and Bowers were together, those fears quickly dissipated. When Key arrived in Juneau, he quickly told Bowers what was happening, even if Bowers had a tough time comprehending.

“Transition wasn’t a word ever used in that kind of context that I knew of,” Bowers said. “I couldn’t understand that phrase. There was no way to put it together. There was no language back then. My thought back then was, ‘I don’t know what this is, but I’m going on this journey with you. There’s nothing that’s going to tear me away

Where are we in this moment in time? We’re at a pretty critical place. We could tip, and I want us to tip in a way where we come back together.

AIDAN KEY

from my sibling.”

Behaving with compassion and respect is important for people hoping to support a transitioning friend, family member or loved one to have, Key said. A willingness to learn is important, too.

He said those same qualities are also important when discussing transgender issues, such as the bathroom bills in “The Most Dangerous Year.”

“If you don’t step into that, you’re just relying on conjecture and uninformed opinions,” Key said. “Why would we do that with something that is so critical? We’ve got children

Know & Go

What: “The Most Dangerous Year” screening and discussion

When: 6:30 p.m., Thursday, June 6

Where: University of Alaska Southeast Egan Library, 11120 Glacier Highway

Admission: Admission is free

Need someone to talk to?

There is a local transgender support group that meets monthly. Those interested can contact Margie Thomson at 723-9574.

whose lives are at stake here, and we have a lot of people with a lot of opinions.”

Key said showing “The Most Dangerous Year” around the country and talking to people from a variety of backgrounds has revealed how many people are approaching transgender issues with open minds and good intentions.

Bowers and Key said generally, the average person’s understanding of gender identity and expression is superior to where Bowers was at in 1998.

Key said that’s one sign that we’re at an important point on the transgender civil rights timeline that he hopes to see continue forward.

“We have a pretty critical moment in time where we can open our hearts and open our ears and step in and learn and put things on the table,” Key said. “That moment in time, in respect to this issue, is a moment in time where our world is more polarized in many ways. Where are we in this moment in time? We’re at a pretty critical place. We could tip, and I want us to tip in a way where we come back together. My hope is that we can continue to find our hearts in this process.”

• Contact arts and culture reporter Ben Hohenstatt at (907)523-2243 or bhohenstatt@juneauempire.com. Follow him on Twitter at @BenHohenstatt.

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